

VZCZCXRO2459  
RR RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHNEH  
DE RUEHCI #0004 0071258  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 071258Z JAN 10  
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2527  
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2430  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 1029  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 1032  
RUEHNEH/AMCONSUL HYDERABAD 0095  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 3157

UNCLAS KOLKATA 000004

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB (TITUS)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER JYOTI BASU CRITICALLY ILL

¶1. (U) Former West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, the longest serving Chief Minister in India's political history (1977-2000) and a founding member of the Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M), was hospitalized on January 1 and is in critical condition. National and local political leaders from across the political spectrum, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (Congress) and Railways Minister Mamata Banerjee (Trinamool), who leads West Bengal's opposition party, have visited the 95-year old political icon in Kolkata. Rumors abound on his actual physical condition, although media currently reports that he is conscious, on a ventilator and in critical condition. In the event of his death, the CPI-M-led West Bengal government will declare a state-wide day of mourning. Post will observe any West Bengal day of mourning and the Mission will send a condolence letter to Basu's family.

¶2. (U) Basu was born in 1914 into an upper class land-owning family. He graduated from Kolkata's renowned Presidency College and then studied law in the United Kingdom. He was first elected to the West Bengal legislative assembly in 1946 with the Communist Party of India. He served as West Bengal's Chief Minister from 1977 - 2000, when he resigned due to health reasons. He was replaced by the current Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. His wife is deceased and he has one son, Chandan Basu.

Comment

¶3. (SBU) Basu's life embodies the rise and fall of the CPI-M, the most powerful force in the Left movement in India. It is difficult to overstate his importance to the country's communist movement. With a political career that spanned six decades, the influence of India's "Chief Communist" extended beyond the borders of West Bengal into the halls of New Delhi. His national stature rivals that of any post-Independence political figure. In 1996 his party's own Politburo decided by a one-vote margin not to participate in the United Front government thereby depriving him of the Prime Minister's chair - a decision he later referred to as a "historic blunder". As the longest serving Chief Minister in India's political history, it was during his watch that the CPI-M institutionalized the iron grip of communist rule in West Bengal, a hold that has slowly begun to loosen since his retirement in 2000. His failing health today may be synonymous with that of the party in West Bengal, and more significantly, in India.

PAYNE